Mira Bai

Usha S. Nilsson

5255

f
Indian
Literature

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

MIRA BAI

Usha S. Nilsson

SAHITYA AKADEMI
NEW DELHI

SAHITYA AKADEMI
Rabindra Bhavan, Ferozeshah Road, New Delhi-110001
Rabindra Sarobar Stadium, Block V-B, Calcutta-700029
21 Haddows Road, Madras-600006
172 Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya Marg, Dadar, Bombay-400014

5255

State Museum Library
Lucknow

© Usha S. Nilsson 1969

First Published 1969
Second Edition 1977

Published by Sahitya Akademi
and printed at Prominent Printers, K-9 Navin Shahdara, Delhi-110032

Introduction

Mira Bai, the famous saint-singer of North India, was born at the time which could be called the Golden Age of Hindi poetry. Noted poets like Kabir, Sur Das, Malik Muhammad Jayasi, and Tulsi Das, the greatest of them all, were her contemporaries. Her own song-verses have been sung all over North India for four centuries.

The milieu in which Mira was born was charged with the consequences of great historical events. The Muslim invasion that started in the eleventh century by Mahmud of Ghazni, resulted in firm Muslim rule over the Northern region of India, though it took several hundred years and involved change of many dynasties.

The Muslims ultimately defeated the Hindu kings, but it took them continuous battles to hold their power. Rajasthan, a territory mainly under Hindu Rajput kings, became directly involved in the battles. It was also torn by the internal strife and intrigues of Rajput kings to gain supremacy.

Mira Bai could not escape the consequences of a disturbed time, but, like many, she found peace in religion.

While the Hindus of the North saw their glory disappear, their kings defeated and killed, their temples—the treasure houses of art and architecture—destroyed, and a new culture supreimposed, the South of India remained comparatively untouched by Muslim culture and it was from there the new religious impetus came to the North. The Hindus, long oppressed, despondent, discouraged under Muslim domination, turned towards religion for solace and inspiration.

For a long time two distinct forms of worship had been developing around the gods, Shiva and Vishnu. Vishnu was identified with the godhead taking incarnation in human form. One such incarnation was known as Rama, another and more popular as Krishna. The devotees of Vishnu were called Vaishnavas.

From the thirteenth century onward, a strong current of Bhakti or devotion began to gather strength in North India. The emphasis was on the attainment of God through personal love, devotion and adoration, rather than through reason and good deeds. One of the great books that contributed to its gathering strength was *Bhagavata Purana*, which describes the incarnation of Vishnu, specially in the form of Krishna. A new directive also came from the teachings of Ramanuja. Coming from South India, he strongly upheld the worship of Vishnu, thus strengthening considerably the Vaishnava sect.

Swayed by the emotional appeal of this Bhakti Marg or way of devotion, people from all walks of life adopted it enthusiastically. The ascetics as well as the householders, working class as well as royalty, came under its influence. In the North, Ramananda and Vallabhacharya became its main propounders. Ramananda preached to all, without distinction of caste, creed or sex. Among his numerous disciples, Kabir was the most illustrious one, who worshipped the Nirguna (attributeless) form of Supreme God. Vallabhacharya, who worshipped Krishna, believed in Pushti (divine grace). His son Vitthal continued the tradition, and, among his disciples a group of eight poets called the Ashta chhap, helped the advancement of the Bhakti movement. Sur Das was the most prominent poet and devotee in this group.

One very important outcome of the Bhakti movement was the strong development of poetry in regional languages. Poetry in India had always been closely linked with religious expression. Most of the notable bhaktas (devotees) mentioned above were also poets of high literary merit, and they devoted their creative genius to writting or singing about their personal deity. In South India a great body of beautiful devotional poetry was composed by Tamil poets called Alvars. In Marathi, Jnaneshvar and Nam Deva, Chandidas in Bengal, Narsi Mehta in Gujarat, all contributed to a very significant corpus of devotional poetry. The Hindi region could not remain unaffected. Kabir composed couplets and songs to bring his teaching to the masses. Tulsi Das, rejecting Sanskrit, chose the language of the people to sing about Rama in his numerous works. Sur Das, a blind poet composed exquisite lyrics decribing Krishna's life and activities. Mira Bai also sang of her love and devotion for Krishna. Though compared to Kabir, Tulsi Das and Sur Das, she holds a minor place in the history of literature, her song-verses (bhajans) nonetheless constitute a special contribution to Bhakti literature.

Contents

1. Mira Bai's Life 11
2. Legends concerning Mira Bai 17
3. Mira Bai and Bhakti 22
4. Mira Bai's Poems 30
5. The Poetic Form 38
6. The Language of Mira Bai's Poems 40
7. Translations 41

Select Bibliography 67

1

Mira Bai's Life

As in the case of several other medieval religious poets of Hindi, no conclusive data are available about Mira Bai's life and works. These poets tell us little about themselves; as humble worshippers of their Lord, any reference to themselves would have been an indication of pride. A true devotee had to renounce the idea of 'self'; he was only important in relation to his deity, and all other material about himself was irrelevant. There is, thus, little that can be gleaned about Mira Bai from her own works.

There are, however, a few sources which offer us some idea about her life and works.

Bhaktamal (or 'Garland of Devotees') compiled by Nabha Das, sometime in the seventeenth century, is one of the prime sources of information about Mira Bai's life. This anthology contains an account of 200 well-known devotees, many of whom were contemporaries of Mira Bai. It is possible that the information included about Mira Bai came from them. *Bhaktamal* says about Mira Bai:

> Forsaking the fear of people's opinion and breaking the ties of her family, Mira Bai worshipped Girdhar. Like a cow-girl (living in the age of Krishna), she revealed her love in the Dark Age (Kali Yug). Fearless and free, she sang the praise of Krishna. Her enemies considering this as a fault, planned for her death. She remained unharmed, drinking poison (as if) it were nectar. She made true devotion prevail, not fearing anyone.[1]

---

[1] Quoted from *Bhaktamal* by Prabhat, *Mira Bai* (Bombay, 1965), p. 37. The translation is mine.

This passage confirms the myths and legends prevalent in Rajasthan about Mira Bai's life and circumstances, and is also backed by references in her own poems, but it does not tell us who she was, where she was born, or who was her husband.

The historians and the scholars have often quarrelled over the details of Mira Bai's life. For a long time the prevalent belief was that Mira Bai was married to the famous Rajput warrior-chief Rana Kumbha (A.D. 1433-1467). This view was put forward by James Tod and was accepted by others. In his *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* Tod said:

> Kumbha married a daughter of the Rathor of Merta, the first of the clans of Marwar. Mirabai was the most celebrated princess of her time for beauty and romantic piety. Her compositions were numerous, though better known to worshippers of the Hindu Apollo than to the ribald bards. Some of her odes and hymns to the deity are preserved and admired. Whether she imbibed her poetic piety from her husband or whether from her he caught the sympathy which produced the sequel to Songs of Govinda, we cannot determine. Her history is a romance and her excess of devotion at every shrine of the favourite deity. . .from Yamuna to Dwarka gave rise to many tales of scandal.[1]

Some later historians refuted this statement on the grounds that, historically and chronologically, Mira Bai could not have been the wife of Rana Kumbha. Harivilas Sarda argued:

> Col. Tod has stated that Mirabai was the queen of Kumbha. This is an error. Kumbha was killed in 1467 A.D., while Mira Bai's grandfather, Duda, became Raja of Merta after that year. Mira Bai's father, Ratan Singh, was killed in the battle of Khanva, 59 years after Kumbha's death. Mirabai was married to Prince Bhoj Raj in 1516 A.D. Mirabai was born in 1498 A.D. and died in 1546 A.D. at Dwarka (Kathia-

---

1. James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (London, 1920), I, pp. 337-338.

war) at which place she had been residing for several years.[1]

These facts were later supported by another historian, Gaurishankar Hirachandra Ojha. It does seem highly unlikely that Mira Bai should have been married to a contemporary of her grandfather. Tod's erroneous belief seems to have been based on the fact that there were two temples standing close to each other in Chitor Fort, one attributed to Rana Kumbha and another to Mira Bai. But Mira Bai's temple at Chitorgarh is archaeologically claimed to have been built later, during the reign of Rana Sanga or of Ratan Singh.[2]

The dates about Mira Bai's life provided by Sarda and Ojha are now generally accepted.

On the basis of the above data, it could be said that Mira Bai was born in Merta in A.D. 1498 Merta was carved out as an independent kingdom by her grandfather, Rao Dudaji, for the maintenance of her father Ratan Singh. Having lost her mother at an early age, she came to stay with her grandparents. Rao Dudaji was not only an able ruler and a wellknown warrior but he was also a devout worshipper of Vishnu. Thus Mira Bai acquired a religious leaning from early childhood. Educated at home, she underwent a rigorous training in music which later became manifest in her own verse. It is quite possible that her education was not limited to cultivating desirable qualities in a princess but that she was also taught skills needed by a Rajput woman to cope with the critical times of sixteenth century Rajasthan.

It is said that during her childhood Mira Bai was given an idol of Krishna by a mendicant. She became deeply attached to it; and probably her religious fervour grew stronger. The legend also has it that Mira Bai kept this idol of Krishna with her during her marriage ceremony and later took it with her to Chitor and refused to worship her husband's patron goddess Kali much to the annoyance of her husband's family.

Mira Bai was married to Bhoj Raj, the eldest son of Rana

---

[1] Harivilas Sarda, *Maharana Sanga* (Ajmer, 1918), pp. 95-96.

[2] Hermann Goetz, *Mira Bai, Her Life and Times* (Bombay, 1966), p. 5.

Sanga, in A.D. 1516. Her husband, the Crown Prince of Mewar, died in 1521, probably from battle wounds, and from then on Mira Bai not only lived the life of a widow, her future was also deeply affected by the turbulent political situation of Rajasthan, and by the internal intrigues among the factions to gain power in Chitor. After the death of her father-in-law, Rana Sanga, Mira Bai's brother-in-law, Ratan Singh, ascended the throne of Mewar. Ratan Singh was strongly opposed to Mira Bai's religious activities. After becoming a widow, Mira Bai's religious ardour had increased. She devoted all her time and energy to the worship of Krishna, accepting him as her divine lover and husband. She could always be found in the temple built specially for her. There she composed songs dedicated to Krishna, and received all the wandering mendicants. Being somewhat of a rebel, she did not hesitate to break the conventions and often ignored the rigid codes of behaviour set for the women of the royal household. This incurred the wrath of the family, especially of the new king. Mira Bai herself was aware of this and said so in her songs:

> I took to keeping hermits' company
> Lost conventional modesty.
>
> . . .
>
> My mother-in-law says
> I destroyed the family honour.
>
> . . .
>
> I have ceased to care
> For people's opinion.

Apparently the Rana wanted to put a stop to all this, and several attempts were made to kill her. Once, a poisonous snake, hidden in a flower basket, was sent to Mira Bai. When she opened the basket, she found a Saligram (idol) instead of the snake. At another time a cup full of poison was sent which she drank without coming to any harm. We find passing references to these incidents in her poems:

O King, I know you gave me poison.
But I emerged
Just like gold burned in fire
Comes out bright as a dozen suns.

Another poem refers exclusively to these incidents:

Mira sang ecstatically of Hari's virtues.
The king sent her a serpent-basket
and placed it in Mira's hands
When, bathed and washed, she took a look
she found an image of God.
A cup of poison was sent by the king
it was turned into nectar.
When bathed and washed, she took a drink
she achieved immortality.
A bed of spikes by the king was sent
ordering Mira to sleep on it.
When evening came and Mira went to sleep
she lay as if on flowers.
Mira's Lord is her eternal saviour
removing obstacles.
Drunk with the mood of pious songs
she vows herself to Girdhar.

Mira Bai naturally credited these miraculous escapes to Krishna. Goetz has an interesting theory that these attempts were solely due to political reasons.[1] Mira Bai, in the opinion of Rana Ratan Singh, belonged to the enemy camp, and he viewed the wandering mendicants as spies.

Even after the assassination of Ratan Singh in A.D. 1531, Mira Bai's troubles did not come to an end. Vikramajit, who succeeded Ratan Singh, continued to persecute her, even though she did not interfere in the political set-up. Tired of restrictions and interference by her husband's family, she left Mewar and returned to her home estate, Merta. This period of peace, however, did not last long. Her uncle, Viram Deo, also objected to her religious activities suited more to a woman ascetic than to the widow of a royal prince. Mira Bai then decided to go to Brindaban, the place of idyllic happiness where Krishna had spent his childhood, loved by everyone, especially the gopis (milkmaids). Finding both Chitor and Merta closed to her, she moved to Dwarka, another place connected with Krishna. There she lived till the end. She died in A.D. 1547.

---

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Though Mira Bai did not mention specific dates, a few facts about her life could be gleaned from her poems. That she was a royal princess from Merta is confirmed by her calling herself 'Mertani', i.e., the one from Merta. The references to the hostile king and her own confessions of violating the royal codes have already been mentioned.

2

Legends concerning Mira Bai

MIRA BAI's great appeal to the people, combined with lack of historical evidence, gave rise to many interesting legends. The most prevalent ones are those that concern her persecution and of her miraculous escapes from the effects of poison and from the snake. There is another variation in which Vikramajit asked Mira Bai to drown herself, which she tried, but did not sink.

Other legends are woven round her death at Dwarka. It is believed that Udai Singh, who succeeded Rana Vikramajit on the throne, sent a deputation of renowned brahmins to bring Mira Bai back. Mira Bai, however, was reluctant to return to war-torn Rajasthan, and to the Rana family. When forced by brahmins, she wished to spend the night at the temple of Ranchhorji (Krishna). In the morning she was nowhere to be found. The devotees believed that Mira Bai, by virtue of divine power, had entered the idol of Ranchhorji. It is not known whether she actually died on that night or in order to preserve her religious beliefs and independence, she quietly left Dwarka at night and spent the rest of her years anonymously going from one place of pilgrimage to another.

Another popular belief is that after hearing about Mira's beauty and devotion, the Mughal king Akbar came to visit her, bringing his court singer Tansen with him. He is also said to have presented a pearl necklace to Mira Bai. Historically again, the validity of this belief is doubtful. Tansen joined Akbar's court in A.D. 1562. If the date of Mira Bai's disappearance is accepted to be A.D. 1547, the meeting of Mira Bai and Akbar is improbable. On the other hand, there is a possibility that Mira Bai might have met Tansen during her wanderings incognito and that Akbar, a young prince at that time, might have come to see her. Goetz favours the latter theory.[1]

There is considerable controversy about Mira Bai's guru (teacher). The traditional belief is that the wandering mendicant who gave Mira Bai the idol of Krishna in her childhood was no other than Raidas, the well-known disciple of Ramanand. Mira Bai has mentioned in one of her songs the name of Raidas as her guru.However, Raidas had to be well over a hundred years of age if he gave Mira Bai the idol. The opinion is divided on this point, and there is no historical evidence to prove that Raidas in fact was the guru of Mira Bai.

HER WORKS

As in the case of Mira Bai's life, there are different opinions about the number of her poetical works. She is, however, best known for her lyrics. These padas (song verses) attributed to Mira Bai total around 400. It is doubtful, however, that these were all composed by her. Several works other than the padas are also said to have been written by her, though their authenticity is not established. At the time Mira Bai lived, there were limited means to preserve manuscripts. Often the royal libraries in Rajasthan would preserve a manuscript or a copy of literary works of note. Mira Bai, though belonging to a royal family, was singularly unfortunate in this respect. After the death of her husband and her father-in-law, Mira Bai was continuously persecuted by successive Ranas. Being so hostile to her, it was highly unlikely that they would have made an effort to keep her works. Merta, Mira Bai's birthplace, would have been the natural place to keep a record of her works, but it was a small estate always disturbed by internal strife, and so nothing was done by Merta.

The works of poets like Kabir were preserved by their disciples. Kabir was a poet as well as a preacher. Though he himself was illiterate, his followers faithfully wrote down all that Kabir had to say. Sur Das, the blind poet, composed new padas to sing the praise of Krishna in a temple in Brindaban. Tulsi Das, an educated man, himself wrote down his own verses. But

---

1. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Mira Bai was not a preacher. She did not have a following of loyal disciples who would preserve her songs as part of her spiritual legacy. Rather she sang before Krishna in the temple and her songs belonged to everyone and all. It is possible that she herself wrote down these songs but no manuscript is found which could be said to have been written by her. She was not striving for poetic recognition and probably did not care to leave her songs in writing.

The wandering minstrels, bards, and court poets often preserved works of literary value and tales about famous kings. *Prithvi Raj Raso*, a major poetical composition, written by King Prithvi Raj's friend and court poet, Chand, was preserved by his family for generations. Mira Bai was not politically important and was not favoured by the royal family. Both the bards and the court poets ignored her.

Mira Bai's life became a legend for the public. The stories of her ordeals and suffering, her intense devotion to Krishna, were carried all over North India by the same ascetics and devotees whom she used to welcome in her temple. Her padas, full of lyrical quality, and spontaneous emotions, found a place in the heart of the common man. The musicians, attractcd by the melodious verse and its universal emotional appeal, kept Mira Bai's songs alive through oral and musical traditions. In all her anthologies we find the special *raga* (mode) mentioned in which each song was to be sung. Mira's songs spread far and wide and became an integral part of the life of the people. We find her poems in Hindi, Gujarati, and Rajasthani. Her popularity with the people was the crucial factor which saved some of her poems from total oblivion.

Most of these padas are addressed to a friend and a confidant. It is said that Mira Bai had a maid named Lalita who remained loyal and faithful to her mistress throughout her life. When Mira Bai left Merta to go to Brindaban, Lalita accompanied her. When Mira Bai sang her newly composed padas, Lalita wrote them down and preserved them. This manuscript was lost when a Muslim ruler of Gujarat looted the treasure of the temple of Ranchhorji sometime in the seventeenth century.[1]

[1] Lalita Prasad Sukul, *Mira Smriti Granth* (Calcutta, 1949), pp. 255-256.

The works attributed to Mira Bai are as follows: *Git Govind Ki Tika*, *Narasi Ji Ro Mahera*, *Padas*, *Pada Collection of Raga Soratha*, *Raga Malar*, *Raga Govinda*, *Satbhama Nu Rusan*, *Mira Ni Garbi*, *Rukmani Mangal*, *Narsi Mehta Ni Hundi*, *Charit*.[1]

Git Govinda ki Tika

This commentary on Git Govinda is said to have been kept in the Royal Library at Jodhpur till the closing years of the nineteenth century, but no manuscript is to be found there now. Rana Kumbha had written a commentary named *Rasik Priya*. Since he was believed to be Mira Bai's husband by historians like Tod, it is possible that this commentary is erroneously attributed to Mira Bai.

Narasi Ji Ro Mahera

It is a narrative containing a dialogue between Mira Bai and another woman called Mithula. It describes a popular ceremony performed on the occasion of a marriage, in this instance by the well-known devotee poet Narsi Mehta. Eight copies of this *Mahera* are available in the libraries and private collections. The text found in these is more or less similar. *Mahera* is insignificant from a literary point of view and it was possibly written by some Vaishnava mendicant named Mira Das.

Likewise, the claims that Mira Bai wrote *Satbhama Nu Rusan*, *Rukmani Mangal*, *Narsi Mehta Ni Hundi* and *Charit* are not backed by conclusive data.

Most of her lyrical works, like *Raga Soratha*, *Mira Bai's Garbi*, *Raga Govinda*, and *Raga Malar* were not originally separate pieces; these lyrics were later arranged under the above titles on the basis of their musical modes, e.g., all her songs sung in Raga Soratha were probably collected and the anthlogy was called by the name of this specific raga. Mira Bai was well trained in the tradition of Indian music and usually composed songs to be sung under a specific mode. Mira Bai is said to have created a special raga, which was named after her, Mira Bai Malar.

---

[1] Generally in this section I have followed Prabhat's *Mira Bai*.

As in the case of Raga Soratha, Mira Bai's songs in Malar have been strung together. The same is true of *Raga Govinda*, which contained songs specifically dedicated to Govinda (Krishna as a cowherd).

The garbi is a song sung with a special dance performed by women. Thirty-seven such garbis are found which, it is possible, were composed by Mira Bai.

Mira Bai's claim to fame rests on her padas, which are found often in anthologies together with the works of other poets. These are believed to be hers on the basis of the stage of linguistic development and grammatical features in her time; and by comparing all the manuscripts and selecting those with a recognizable similarity which may be attributed to Mira Bai. Another factor, though not always a conclusive evidence, is the inclusion of her name in the poem as a kind of signature. Her name is found in *Mahera* and *Satbhama Nu Rusan* but it could not be said definitely that it is the same Mira.

Though perhaps not the earliest, the most complete volume of Mira Bai's poems is the one found in Dakore, which contains only 103 poems, included in all the anthologies. Songs culled from other anthologies number around 400. Most of these are repetitions of the 103 core poems and could easily be regarded as later additions. Mira Bai's style was not difficult to imitate, and her sentiments held a wide appeal.

5255

3

Mira Bai and Bhakti

THE DEVOTEE and the poet in Mira Bai are so completely merged that it becomes necessary to examine her poetry in the context of her religious beliefs, to understand and evaluate it.

As has been mentioned before, Mira Bai was not a reformer or preacher like Kabir, nor did she present a special world-view like Tulsi Das. She accepted all the tenets of bhakti and followed them unwaveringly all her life. Like most devotees her ultimate goal was the release from the cycle of birth and rebirth, and to be united with the Supreme Being, who for her was symbolized in the human, personal, beatific, and joyous form of Krishna.

Krishna, as worshipped by most bhaktas, was not the warrior hero of the epic *Mahabharata*, but the dark, attractive, mischievous child and lover described in the tenth book of *Bhagavata Purana*. This book tells the circumstances in which Vishnu decided to take birth as Krishna. In Mathura, a town in North India, ruled the tyrant Kansa. Forewarned by a prophecy that the eighth child of his cousin Devaki would be his killer, he imprisoned Devaki and her husband Vasudeva, subsequently killing all their children at their birth. At last the time came for Krishna to be born. He appeared before his father in the form of Vishnu and commanded Vasudeva to exchange him for the child born to Vasudeva's friend Nand, in the neighbouring locality known as Gokul. By divine power the fetters fell, the doors opened, the guards fell asleep and Vasudeva accomplished the exchange. No one knew what had taken place at night. Even Nand and his wife Yashoda, who were in a trance at the time, did not know that Krishna had been exchanged with their child. This child, hiding his divinity, grew up like any other child in that community. The people in the village were mostly cowherds, and Krishna grew up and joined other boys in taking out the cows grazing. His childhood years had not been without incidents. He destroyed several demons who came to Brindaban with the purpose of killing him. These deeds and actions, while seeming natural, gave the cowherds an idea of Krishna's super-human strength. They did not know who he really was, though he was loved by all for his beauty and his childish pranks.

The next phase of Krishna's life featured his romance with the gopis.

> Although all of them are married, the cowgirls find his presence irresistible and despite the warnings of morality and the existence of their husbands, each falls utterly in love with him. As Krishna wanders in the forest, the cowgirls can talk of nothing but his charms. They do their work but their thoughts are of him. They stay at home but all the time each is filled with desperate longing.[1]

One night they heard his flute, and all of them, forgetting their husbands and homes, were drawn towards the banks of the Jamuna where Krishna was waiting for them. They joined Krishna in singing and dancing. Krishna, using his delusive powers, took so many forms that each gopi thought that Krishna was exclusively hers and in this way he pleased each. The gopis, completely bewitched and under his power, loved him only as Nand's handsome son, though sometimes they felt that Krishna's entire personality was charged with some magical and indefinable quality. Krishna, with his yellow scarf, peacock feather crown, flute in hand, grazed the cows and played with the gopis. But this idyllic state of affairs was cut short when the the time came for Krishna to leave Brindaban and go to Mathura, to kill Kansa. A messenger called Akrur arrived in Brindaban and took Krishna away with him, leaving Brindaban desolate. The river Jamuna, on whose banks he had roamed, the cows he had taken care of, his friends, were all disconsolate, and mourned deeply at his leaving, most of all the gopis. Though Mathura was not far away, the gopis never saw Krishna again, because after killing Kansa he joined his princely clan of Yadavas and moved away from there.

---

[1] W G. Archer, *The Loves of Krishna* (New York, 1964), p 36.

Mira Bai regarded herself as a gopi and her bhakti equalled the same selfless love, fraught with infinite suffering, that the gopis had for Krishna. For this reason, her bhakti is considered to be of the highest quality, as set by *Bhagavata Purana.* Vallabhacharya and his sect also considered the love of gopis for Krishna as of the best kind, because it was deep, all pervading, and constant.

The tenet of bhakti is given by Krishna in the eighteenth chapter of *Bhagvad Gita* in these words:

> Have your mind on me, your devotion towards me, your sacrifice to me, worship me. To me you will come, truly I promise you, for you are dear to me.

A true devotee, therefore, never lost sight of this goal, and all his feelings and activities became directed towards Krishna.

Its external manifestations, found so often in bhakti poetry, are described in the following way:

> Bhakti (in this work *Bhagavata Purana*) is a surging emotion which chokes the speech, makes the tears flow and the hair thrill with a pleasurable excitement, and often leads to hysterical laughing and weeping by turns, to sudden fainting fits and to long trances of unconsciousness. We are told that it is produced by gazing at the images of Krishna, singing his praises, remembering him in meditation, keeping company with his devotees, hearing them tell the mighty deeds of Krishna and talking with them about his glory and his love. All this rouses the passionate bhakti which will give long devotion to his service. Such devotion leads speedily to release.[1]

---

1. J.N. Farquhar, *An Outline of Religious Literature of India* (London, 1920), p. 230.

Vallabhacharya has described four kinds of relationships that can exist between a bhakta and God: *Vatsalya*, *Dasya*, *Sakhya*, *Madhurya*.

These are not mutually exclusive, but most poets have expressed one or more aspects in their poetry. Sur Das concentrated on *vatsalya* and *madhurya bhava*. *Vatsalya bhava* consists of regarding Krishna or Rama from the point of view of Nand, and Yashoda or Dasrath and Kaushalya, i.e. the predominant feeling in such form of bhakti is parental love for the child. Mira Bai also has manifested the *vatsalya* form but not very often. As compared to Sur Das's poems on this subject, Mira Bai's are very few in number, traditionally describing Yashoda's songs to wake up the sleeping child in the morning.

In *dasya*, a bhakta regards himself as a servant of his deity. He elaborates on his sins and his shortcomings, requesting his Lord to forgive and to release him from the entanglements of this world. Mira Bai has also expressed *dasya bhava* in her poems, especially in her poems of entreaty. Even in the poems where the feeling of conjungal love is the central theme, Mira Bai never forgets the divine identity of her lover and concludes the pada by saying that Mira's Lord is Girdhar Nagar, and she is the eternal worsbipper at his feet.

It is true, though, that unlike Tulsi Das's, Mira Bai's predominant form of bhakti is not *dasya bhava*. *Sakhya* and *madhurya bhava* merge in Mira Bai's songs. The feeling of equality and familiarity, that exists between friends marks *Sakhya bhava*. *Madhurya*, which, again, has been accepted as the highest form of bhakti presents the love between a man and a woman in all its joys and pains. Mira Bai's bhakti is mainly of *madhurya bhava*; in this she regards herself as a wife, beloved, and friend of Krishna. Her feelings achieve the same height, intensity, and absorption that the gopis had for Krishna. Therefore the largest number of her poems contain the expression of this love.

Mira Bai, essentially following the path of love, carried out a regimen required of a true devotee. As stated in *Bhagavata Purana*, this is ninefold, and consists of:

1. *Shravana*, hearing the praise of one's Lord. Mira Bai accomplished it by keeping company with the ascetics and

people worshipping the same deity and later by going on a pilgrimage to places connected with Krishna, where such activity must have gone on continuously.

2. *Kirtana*, singing the praise of one's Lord. Mira Bai's padas abound in singing Krishna's praises. Again and again she says:

> O Mother, I shall sing of Govinda's virtues.

3. *Smarana*, remembering and recollection. A large number of Mira Bai's padas contain the bitter-sweet joy of remembering the beloved Krishna, e.g.

> See my friend,
> Hari has hardened his heart towards me.
> He said he would come
> but even today he didn't
> though he promised.
> I have forgotten food, drink
> and lost my reason
> how am I still living?
> I took his word
> against the world's.
> Why has he forgotten me?
> O Lord of Mira, Girdhar Nagar,
> Without you my heart is torn.

4. *Padasevana*, service of the Lord's feet. Mira Bai could never forget the divinity of her lover Krishna. For this reason, serving the lotus-like feet of Girdhar acquired a deeper meaning. No matter what sentiment she expresses in a poem, she concludes it by saying:

> Mira's Lord is Girdhar Nagar
> She is the slave of his lotus feet.

5. *Archana* and 6. *Vandana*, deal with more external rituals, like acts of worship of images of the Lord and paying respect

to him. Mira Bai's strong attachment to the idol given to her in childhood was well known. There is no doubt that she carried out this form of devotion throughout her life.

7. *Dasya*, development of servile sentiment, was not the predominent *bhava* or feeling in Mira Bai, yet she tried to cultivate it and expressed it very poignantly,

> Keep me as your servant, O Girdhar
> Keep me as your slave.
> While I am serving I shall plant gardens,
> arising every morning I shall see you.
> In the shaded lanes of Brindaban
> I shall sing of Govinda's deeds.
> In my servanthood I shall get his vision,
> the remembrance would be my pay.
> And my estate, the devotion and love
> All three are pleasing to me.

8. *Sakhya*, development of friendly sentiment. As it has been mentioned earlier, Mira Bai's bhakti often regarded Krishna on equal terms, with familiarity born of attachment.

9. *Atmanivedan*, expressing one's feelings. Throughout her padas, Mira Bai is telling Krishna the state of her mind and her feelings Her padas are nothing but simple, spontaneous expression of her joys, sorrows, and her devotion.

Mira Bai also followed other steps connected with bhakti, which regarded the Lord as the only reality, put him before everyone else, and enjoined keeping company with holy men. Her behaviour, which seemed very unorthodox and somewhat degrading to her family, was thus fully in consonance with her devotion, and was only following the way of bhakti. She knew herself that she was breaking the rules, but, immersed in her devotion, she ceased to care.

II

When Mira Bai sang:

I have only Girdhar Gopal
And no one else at all

she was not limiting the concept of God only to Krishna as the cowherd, bearing the mountain. It is true that, among all the forms, the dark-complexioned son of Nand, the dweller of Braj, was most dear to her. This Ksishna took the cows out to graze on the bank of Jamuna, played on his flute, danced with the gopis. Most of her poems sing of this Krishna, as a lover and as a husband.

The other form manifested is that of a yogi, or an ascetic who has left home and who wears saffron robes. Mira Bai herself has become a yogini (female ascetic) in his quest. There is nothing but sorrow if one loves a yogi,

Sorrow is one's portion
if you love a yogi
I tell you, friend, there is no joy in loving.
A yogi is no one's friend.

There is a possibility that Mira Bai might have taken this idea from the Nath sect, the followers of which saw their God in the form of a yogi.[1]

In some poems, Vishnu is mentioned as the supreme God. In these, Vishnu appears in his traditional attributes, as *antaryami* (omnipresent), all powerful, and extremely kind towards his bhaktas and always helping them in need. It is with great humility and hope that Mira bai mentions this form, for he has saved Draupadi from nakedness by extending her sari indefinitely, saved an elephant from the jaws of the alligator, Prahlad from his tyrant father. She is also fully aware that Krishna, despite his human appearance, is really the incarnation of Vishnu, and one should not be deluded by Krishna's *leela* (sport on earth).

---

[1] Sri Krishna Lal, *Mira Bai* (Allahabad, 1949), p. 129.

My Lord, appearing as an actor,
has charmed the world.

Occasionally, Mira Bai's God becomes an abstract, transcendental, formless, attributeless God, very much like that of Kabir and Nanak. He is mysterious, near yet far. He is the lover beyond grasp because he dwells in the sky.

My lover's bed is in the sky
How to accomplish the union?

she sings.

In some padas Mira Bai has mentioned Rama, but it is clear that by that she does not mean the hero of the *Ramayana*, the supreme deity of Tulsi Das, but a substitute for Krishna. For her, as incarnations of Vishnu there was no basic difference between the two.

4

Mira Bai's Poems

THE POEMS of Mira Bai do not cover a wide range of subjects. They are strictly a form of self-expression, completely dedicated to Krishna. It is difficult to gauge from her poetry that she had lived in a time of political upheavals, and internal intrigues. She did not use her poetry to criticize religious rituals like Kabir, nor did she present a highly idealized portrait of her deity like Tulsi Das. She regarded herself first and foremost a devotee completely absorbed in Krishna. That is why she sang of him, not of human beings. All the references to people are in the obsessive context of her bhakti, e.g. in the poems where she mentions Rana's attempts to kill her, she is actually showing how merciful and compassionate Krishna had been to her.

Mira Bai's padas fall into two categories:

(1) The songs of entreaty and salutation.

(2) The songs of love and related experiences.

The songs in the first group are very few in number. While composing these, Mira Bai was keeping up the tradition of bhakta poets in showing herself as a helpless, unprotected and sinful being, entreating Krishna to overlook her faults and to help her. The bhakta poets regarded themselves as the lowliest of lowly creatures, so that in helping them, God's great kindness became manifest. In her poems, Mira Bai maintains befitting humility: she is the servant of her Girdhar Nagar (her favourite epithet for Krishna), and she is content with lying at his lotus feet. Occasionally she comes very close to the poems of Tulsi Das and Sur Das in her *dasya bhava*, e.g.

Drink the delights of the name of Rama

O heart,
Shun the evil, sit with good men, listening
to the tales of Hari every day.
Put lust, anger, arrogance, greed and
selfishness out of thoughts.
Mira's Lord is Girdhar Nagar
She is drenched in his colour.

Tr. S. M. Pandey and Zide

Actually these padas of entreaty denote the second stage of her development as a true bhakta or devotee. The poems written in the beginning occasionally hint at her dissatisfaction with the ways of the world and with destiny.

Strange are the ways of destiny,
The fools reign on the throne,
The wise men are destitutes.
The sweet water of the rivers
is polluted by the salty sea.

This sentiment, in the context of her personal life, is natural, since she was widowed early, was persecuted by her husband's family, and had eventually to live in exile. But she became reconciled to her situation and found comfort in the worship of Krishna. After that only her devotion remained steadfast, unshakable, and she believed that even the cycle of births and deaths could not destroy it. Obviously her inital rebellion turned into detachment from the world, and her early devotion into love.

From the poetic fervour of her love songs, it becomes evident that Mira Bai, in her songs of entreaty, was merely following the prevalent *dasya* tradition. These songs are marked by a lack of originality. She used stock phrases in praising the deity, listing stock situations.

Mira Bai is at her lyrical best when singing of her love for Krishna. These poems form the core of Mira Bai's writings. Her love is sung in its multiple facets: attraction, hope, longing, disappointment, jealousy, anger, and the joy of union. These poems are not in any sequence of time, but only capture the mood of the moment. Experienced on the spiritual level rather than on the physical, this love represents the constant craving of the soul to be merged with *paramatman*, the infinite God, thus achieving eternal peace.

In some of the songs, Mira Bai expresses her belief that her love has continued through time and the cycles of many births.

Rana, I go to Girdhari
Girdhari is my only love
I am captivated by his beauty.
Our love is old, I cannot live without him.
Our love is from the previous life,
it can't be abandoned now.
It does not matter if the marriage has taken place in a dream,
Mother, Dinanath wed me in my dream.

On occasions when Mira Bai identifies herself with the gopis, she goes through all the emotions of a girl falling in love. She, as a gopi, has come out to sell milk and curds in the lanes of Brindaban. There she meets Krishna and is completely bewitched:

She forgot the name of curd
called out "Someone, come buy my piquant Shyam"
In the sylvan lanes of Brindaban
She was captivated by the charmer of hearts.

Krishna is dark-complexioned, comely and attractive. A peacock feather crown adorns his forehead, his earrings sparkle, and dark curls rest on his cheeks. She cannot help but say:

Krishna, I follow you everywhere
In the wooded lanes of Brindaban
you grabbed my arm.
Having drunk the buttermilk
you broke the pitcher.
Dark complexioned and attractively formed,

2

Legends concerning Mira Bai

MIRA BAI's great appeal to the people, combined with lack of historical evidence, gave rise to many interesting legends. The most prevalent ones are those that concern her persecution and of her miraculous escapes from the effects of poison and from the snake. There is another variation in which Vikramajit asked Mira Bai to drown herself, which she tried, but did not sink.

Other legends are woven round her death at Dwarka. It is believed that Udai Singh, who succeeded Rana Vikramajit on the throne, sent a deputation of renowned brahmins to bring Mira Bai back. Mira Bai, however, was reluctant to return to war-torn Rajasthan, and to the Rana family. When forced by brahmins, she wished to spend the night at the temple of Ranchhorji (Krishna). In the morning she was nowhere to be found. The devotees believed that Mira Bai, by virtue of divine power, had entered the idol of Ranchhorji. It is not known whether she actually died on that night or in order to preserve her religious beliefs and independence, she quietly left Dwarka at night and spent the rest of her years anonymously going from one place of pilgrimage to another.

Another popular belief is that after hearing about Mira's beauty and devotion, the Mughal king Akbar came to visit her, bringing his court singer Tansen with him. He is also said to have presented a pearl necklace to Mira Bai. Historically again, the validity of this belief is doubtful. Tansen joined Akbar's court in A.D. 1562. If the date of Mira Bai's disappearance is accepted to be A.D. 1547, the meeting of Mira Bai and Akbar is improbable. On the other hand, there is a possibility that Mira Bai might have met Tansen during her wanderings incognito and that Akbar, a young prince at that time, might have come to see her. Goetz favours the latter theory.[1]

There is considerable controversy about Mira Bai's guru (teacher). The traditional belief is that the wandering mendicant who gave Mira Bai the idol of Krishna in her childhood was no other than Raidas, the well-known disciple of Ramanand. Mira Bai has mentioned in one of her songs the name of Raidas as her guru.However, Raidas had to be well over a hundred years of age if he gave Mira Bai the idol. The opinion is divided on this point, and there is no historical evidence to prove that Raidas in fact was the guru of Mira Bai.

HER WORKS

As in the case of Mira Bai's life, there are different opinions about the number of her poetical works. She is, however, best known for her lyrics. These padas (song verses) attributed to Mira Bai total around 400. It is doubtful, however, that these were all composed by her. Several works other than the padas are also said to have been written by her, though their authenticity is not established. At the time Mira Bai lived, there were limited means to preserve manuscripts. Often the royal libraries in Rajasthan would preserve a manuscript or a copy of literary works of note. Mira Bai, though belonging to a royal family, was singularly unfortunate in this respect. After the death of her husband and her father-in-law, Mira Bai was continuously persecuted by successive Ranas. Being so hostile to her, it was highly unlikely that they would have made an effort to keep her works. Merta, Mira Bai's birthplace, would have been the natural place to keep a record of her works, but it was a small estate always disturbed by internal strife, and so nothing was done by Merta.

The works of poets like Kabir were preserved by their disciples. Kabir was a poet as well as a preacher. Though he himself was illiterate, his followers faithfully wrote down all that Kabir had to say. Sur Das, the blind poet, composed new padas to sing the praise of Krishna in a temple in Brindaban. Tulsi Das, an educated man, himself wrote down his own verses. But

---

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Mira Bai was not a preacher. She did not have a following of loyal disciples who would preserve her songs as part of her spiritual legacy. Rather she sang before Krishna in the temple and her songs belonged to everyone and all. It is possible that she herself wrote down these songs but no manuscript is found which could be said to have been written by her. She was not striving for poetic recognition and probably did not care to leave her songs in writing.

The wandering minstrels, bards, and court poets often preserved works of literary value and tales about famous kings. *Prithvi Raj Raso*, a major poetical composition, written by King Prithvi Raj's friend and court poet, Chand, was preserved by his family for generations. Mira Bai was not politically important and was not favoured by the royal family. Both the bards and the court poets ignored her.

Mira Bai's life became a legend for the public. The stories of her ordeals and suffering, her intense devotion to Krishna, were carried all over North India by the same ascetics and devotees whom she used to welcome in her temple. Her padas, full of lyrical quality, and spontaneous emotions, found a place in the heart of the common man. The musicians, attracted by the melodious verse and its universal emotional appeal, kept Mira Bai's songs alive through oral and musical traditions. In all her anthologies we find the special *raga* (mode) mentioned in which each song was to be sung. Mira's songs spread far and wide and became an integral part of the life of the people. We find her poems in Hindi, Gujarati, and Rajasthani. Her popularity with the people was the crucial factor which saved some of her poems from total oblivion.

Most of these padas are addressed to a friend and a confidant. It is said that Mira Bai had a maid named Lalita who remained loyal and faithful to her mistress throughout her life. When Mira Bai left Merta to go to Brindaban, Lalita accompanied her. When Mira Bai sang her newly composed padas, Lalita wrote them down and preserved them. This manuscript was lost when a Muslim ruler of Gujarat looted the treasure of the temple of Ranchhorji sometime in the seventeenth century.[1]

[1] Lalita Prasad Sukul, *Mira Smriti Granth* (Calcutta, 1949), pp. 255-256.

The works attributed to Mira Bai are as follows: *Git Govind Ki Tika*, *Narasi Ji Ro Mahera*, *Padas*, *Pada Collection of Raga Soratha*, *Raga Malar*, *Raga Govinda*, *Satbhama Nu Rusan*, *Mira Ni Garbi*, *Rukmani Mangal*, *Narsi Mehta Ni Hundi*, *Charit*.[1]

Git Govinda ki Tika

This commentary on Git Govinda is said to have been kept in the Royal Library at Jodhpur till the closing years of the nineteenth century, but no manuscript is to be found there now. Rana Kumbha had written a commentary named *Rasik Priya.* Since he was believed to be Mira Bai's husband by historians like Tod, it is possible that this commentary is erroneously attributed to Mira Bai.

Narasi Ji Ro Mahera

It is a narrative containing a dialogue between Mira Bai and another woman called Mithula. It describes a popular ceremony performed on the occasion of a marriage, in this instance by the well-known devotee poet Narsi Mehta. Eight copies of this *Mahera* are available in the libraries and private collections. The text found in these is more or less similar. *Mahera* is insignificant from a literary point of view and it was possibly written by some Vaishnava mendicant named Mira Das.

Likewise, the claims that Mira Bai wrote *Satbhama Nu Rusan*, *Rukmani Mangal*, *Narsi Mehta Ni Hundi* and *Charit* are not backed by conclusive data.

Most of her lyrical works, like *Raga Soratha*, *Mira Bai's Garbi*, *Raga Govinda*, and *Raga Malar* were not originally separate pieces; these lyrics were later arranged under the above titles on the basis of their musical modes, e.g., all her songs sung in Raga Soratha were probably collected and the anthlogy was called by the name of this specific raga. Mira Bai was well trained in the tradition of Indian music and usually composed songs to be sung under a specific mode. Mira Bai is said to have created a special raga, which was named after her, Mira Bai Malar.

---

[1] Generally in this section I have followed Prabhat's *Mira Bai.*

As in the case of Raga Soratha, Mira Bai's songs in Malar have been strung together. The same is true of *Raga Govinda*, which contained songs specifically dedicated to Govinda (Krishna as a cowherd).

The garbi is a song sung with a special dance performed by women. Thirty-seven such garbis are found which, it is possible, were composed by Mira Bai.

Mira Bai's claim to fame rests on her padas, which are found often in anthologies together with the works of other poets. These are believed to be hers on the basis of the stage of linguistic development and grammatical features in her time; and by comparing all the manuscripts and selecting those with a recognizable similarity which may be attributed to Mira Bai. Another factor, though not always a conclusive evidence, is the inclusion of her name in the poem as a kind of signature. Her name is found in *Mahera* and *Satbhama Nu Rusan* but it could not be said definitely that it is the same Mira.

Though perhaps not the earliest, the most complete volume of Mira Bai's poems is the one found in Dakore, which contains only 103 poems, included in all the anthologies. Songs culled from other anthologies number around 400. Most of these are repetitions of the 103 core poems and could easily be regarded as later additions. Mira Bai's style was not difficult to imitate, and her sentiments held a wide appeal.

3

Mira Bai and Bhakti

THE DEVOTEE and the poet in Mira Bai are so completely merged that it becomes necessary to examine her poetry in the context of her religious beliefs, to understand and evaluate it.

As has been mentioned before, Mira Bai was not a reformer or preacher like Kabir, nor did she present a special world-view like Tulsi Das. She accepted all the tenets of bhakti and followed them unwaveringly all her life. Like most devotees her ultimate goal was the release from the cycle of birth and rebirth, and to be united with the Supreme Being, who for her was symbolized in the human, personal, beatific, and joyous form of Krishna.

Krishna, as worshipped by most bhaktas, was not the warrior hero of the epic *Mahabharata*, but the dark, attractive, mischievous child and lover described in the tenth book of *Bhagavata Purana*. This book tells the circumstances in which Vishnu decided to take birth as Krishna. In Mathura, a town in North India, ruled the tyrant Kansa. Forewarned by a prophecy that the eighth child of his cousin Devaki would be his killer, he imprisoned Devaki and her husband Vasudeva, subsequently killing all their children at their birth. At last the time came for Krishna to be born. He appeared before his father in the form of Vishnu and commanded Vasudeva to exchange him for the child born to Vasudeva's friend Nand, in the neighbouring locality known as Gokul. By divine power the fetters fell, the doors opened, the guards fell asleep and Vasudeva accomplished the exchange. No one knew what had taken place at night. Even Nand and his wife Yashoda, who were in a trance at the time, did not know that Krishna had been exchanged with their child. This child, hiding his divinity, grew up like any other child in that community. The people in the village were mostly cowherds, and Krishna grew up and joined other boys in taking out the cows grazing. His childhood years had not been without incidents. He destroyed several demons who came to Brindaban with the purpose of killing him. These deeds and actions, while seeming natural, gave the cowherds an idea of Krishna's super-human strength. They did not know who he really was, though he was loved by all for his beauty and his childish pranks.

The next phase of Krishna's life featured his romance with the gopis.

> Although all of them are married, the cowgirls find his presence irresistible and despite the warnings of morality and the existence of their husbands, each falls utterly in love with him. As Krishna wanders in the forest, the cowgirls can talk of nothing but his charms. They do their work but their thoughts are of him. They stay at home but all the time each is filled with desperate longing.[1]

One night they heard his flute, and all of them, forgetting their husbands and homes, were drawn towards the banks of the Jamuna where Krishna was waiting for them. They joined Krishna in singing and dancing. Krishna, using his delusive powers, took so many forms that each gopi thought that Krishna was exclusively hers and in this way he pleased each. The gopis, completely bewitched and under his power, loved him only as Nand's handsome son, though sometimes they felt that Krishna's entire personality was charged with some magical and indefinable quality. Krishna, with his yellow scarf, peacock feather crown, flute in hand, grazed the cows and played with the gopis. But this idyllic state of affairs was cut short when the the time came for Krishna to leave Brindaban and go to Mathura, to kill Kansa. A messenger called Akrur arrived in Brindaban and took Krishna away with him, leaving Brindaban desolate. The river Jamuna, on whose banks he had roamed, the cows he had taken care of, his friends, were all disconsolate, and mourned deeply at his leaving, most of all the gopis. Though Mathura was not far away, the gopis never saw Krishna again, because after killing Kansa he joined his princely clan of Yadavas and moved away from there.

---

[1] W G. Archer, *The Loves of Krishna* (New York, 1964), p 36.

Mira Bai regarded herself as a gopi and her bhakti equalled the same selfless love, fraught with infinite suffering, that the gopis had for Krishna. For this reason, her bhakti is considered to be of the highest quality, as set by *Bhagavata Purana*. Vallabhacharya and his sect also considered the love of gopis for Krishna as of the best kind, because it was deep, all pervading, and constant.

The tenet of bhakti is given by Krishna in the eighteenth chapter of *Bhagvad Gita* in these words:

> Have your mind on me, your devotion towards me, your sacrifice to me, worship me. To me you will come, truly I promise you, for you are dear to me.

A true devotee, therefore, never lost sight of this goal, and all his feelings and activities became directed towards Krishna.

Its external manifestations, found so often in bhakti poetry, are described in the following way:

> Bhakti (in this work *Bhagavata Purana*) is a surging emotion which chokes the speech, makes the tears flow and the hair thrill with a pleasurable excitement, and often leads to hysterical laughing and weeping by turns, to sudden fainting fits and to long trances of unconsciousness. We are told that it is produced by gazing at the images of Krishna, singing his praises, remembering him in meditation, keeping company with his devotees, hearing them tell the mighty deeds of Krishna and talking with them about his glory and his love. All this rouses the passionate bhakti which will give long devotion to his service. Such devotion leads speedily to release.[1]

---

[1] J.N. Farquhar, *An Outline of Religious Literature of India* (London, 1920), p. 230.

Vallabhacharya has described four kinds of relationships that can exist between a bhakta and God: *Vatsalya*, *Daśya*, *Sakhya*, *Madhurya*.

These are not mutually exclusive, but most poets have expressed one or more aspects in their poetry. Sur Das concentrated on *vatsalya* and *madhurya bhava*. *Vatsalya bhava* consists of regarding Krishna or Rama from the point of view of Nand, and Yashoda or Dasrath and Kaushalya, i.e. the predominant feeling in such form of bhakti is parental love for the child. Mira Bai also has manifested the *vatsalya* form but not very often. As compared to Sur Das's poems on this subject, Mira Bai's are very few in number, traditionally describing Yashoda's songs to wake up the sleeping child in the morning.

In *dasya*, a bhakta regards himself as a servant of his deity. He elaborates on his sins and his shortcomings, requesting his Lord to forgive and to release him from the entanglements of this world. Mira Bai has also expressed *dasya bhava* in her poems, especially in her poems of entreaty. Even in the poems where the feeling of conjungal love is the central theme, Mira Bai never forgets the divine identity of her lover and concludes the pada by saying that Mira's Lord is Girdhar Nagar, and she is the eternal worsbipper at his feet.

It is true, though, that unlike Tulsi Das's, Mira Bai's predominant form of bhakti is not *dasya bhava*. *Sakhya* and *madhurya bhava* merge in Mira Bai's songs. The feeling of equality and familiarity, that exists between friends marks *Sakhya bhava*. *Madhurya*, which, again, has been accepted as the highest form of bhakti presents the love between a man and a woman in all its joys and pains. Mira Bai's bhakti is mainly of *madhurya bhava*; in this she regards herself as a wife, beloved, and friend of Krishna. Her feelings achieve the same height, intensity, and absorption that the gopis had for Krishna. Therefore the largest number of her poems contain the expression of this love.

Mira Bai, essentially following the path of love, carried out a regimen required of a true devotee. As stated in *Bhagavata Purana*, this is ninefold, and consists of:

1. *Shravana*, hearing the praise of one's Lord. Mira Bai accomplished it by keeping company with the ascetics and

people worshipping the same deity and later by going on a pilgrimage to places connected with Krishna, where such activity must have gone on continuously.

2. *Kirtana*, singing the praise of one's Lord. Mira Bai's padas abound in singing Krishna's praises. Again and again she says:

O Mother, I shall sing of Govinda's virtues.

3. *Smarana*, remembering and recollection. A large number of Mira Bai's padas contain the bitter-sweet joy of remembering the beloved Krishna, e.g.

See my friend,
Hari has hardened his heart towards me.
He said he would come
but even today he didn't
though he promised.
I have forgotten food, drink
and lost my reason
how am I still living?
I took his word
against the world's.
Why has he forgotten me?
O Lord of Mira, Girdhar Nagar,
Without you my heart is torn.

4. *Padasevana*, service of the Lord's feet. Mira Bai could never forget the divinity of her lover Krishna. For this reason, serving the lotus-like feet of Girdhar acquired a deeper meaning. No matter what sentiment she expresses in a poem, she concludes it by saying:

Mira's Lord is Girdhar Nagar
She is the slave of his lotus feet.

5. *Archana* and 6. *Vandana*, deal with more external rituals, like acts of worship of images of the Lord and paying respect

to him. Mira Bai's strong attachment to the idol given to her in childhood was well known. There is no doubt that she carried out this form of devotion throughout her life.

7. *Dasya*, development of servile sentiment, was not the predominent *bhava* or feeling in Mira Bai, yet she tried to cultivate it and expressed it very poignantly,

> Keep me as your servant, O Girdhar
> Keep me as your slave.
> While I am serving I shall plant gardens,
> arising every morning I shall see you.
> In the shaded lanes of Brindaban
> I shall sing of Govinda's deeds.
> In my servanthood I shall get his vision,
> the remembrance would be my pay.
> And my estate, the devotion and love
> All three are pleasing to me.

8. *Sakhya*, development of friendly sentiment. As it has been mentioned earlier, Mira Bai's bhakti often regarded Krishna on equal terms, with familiarity born of attachment.

9. *Atmanivedan*, expressing one's feelings. Throughout her padas, Mira Bai is telling Krishna the state of her mind and her feelings Her padas are nothing but simple, spontaneous expression of her joys, sorrows, and her devotion.

Mira Bai also followed other steps connected with bhakti, which regarded the Lord as the only reality, put him before everyone else, and enjoined keeping company with holy men. Her behaviour, which seemed very unorthodox and somewhat degrading to her family, was thus fully in consonance with her devotion, and was only following the way of bhakti. She knew herself that she was breaking the rules, but, immersed in her devotion, she ceased to care.

II

When Mira Bai sang:

I have only Girdhar Gopal
And no one else at all

she was not limiting the concept of God only to Krishna as the cowherd, bearing the mountain. It is true that, among all the forms, the dark-complexioned son of Nand, the dweller of Braj, was most dear to her. This Ksishna took the cows out to graze on the bank of Jamuna, played on his flute, danced with the gopis. Most of her poems sing of this Krishna, as a lover and as a husband.

The other form manifested is that of a yogi, or an ascetic who has left home and who wears saffron robes. Mira Bai herself has become a yogini (female ascetic) in his quest. There is nothing but sorrow if one loves a yogi,

Sorrow is one's portion
if you love a yogi
I tell you, friend, there is no joy in loving.
A yogi is no one's friend.

There is a possibility that Mira Bai might have taken this idea from the Nath sect, the followers of which saw their God in the form of a yogi.[1]

In some poems, Vishnu is mentioned as the supreme God. In these, Vishnu appears in his traditional attributes, as *antaryami* (omnipresent), all powerful, and extremely kind towards his bhaktas and always helping them in need. It is with great humility and hope that Mira bai mentions this form, for he has saved Draupadi from nakedness by extending her sari indefinitely, saved an elephant from the jaws of the alligator, Prahlad from his tyrant father. She is also fully aware that Krishna, despite his human appearance, is really the incarnation

[1] Sri Krishna Lal, *Mira Bai* (Allahabad, 1949), p. 129.

of Vishnu, and one should not be deluded by Krishna's *leela* (sport on earth).

> My Lord, appearing as an actor,
> has charmed the world.

Occasionally, Mira Bai's God becomes an abstract, transcendental, formless, attributeless God, very much like that of Kabir and Nanak. He is mysterious, near yet far. He is the lover beyond grasp because he dwells in the sky.

> My lover's bed is in the sky
> How to accomplish the union?

she sings.

In some padas Mira Bai has mentioned Rama, but it is clear that by that she does not mean the hero of the *Ramayana*, the supreme deity of Tulsi Das, but a substitute for Krishna. For her, as incarnations of Vishnu there was no basic difference between the two.

4

Mira Bai's Poems

THE POEMS of Mira Bai do not cover a wide range of subjects. They are strictly a form of self-expression, completely dedicated to Krishna. It is difficult to gauge from her poetry that she had lived in a time of political upheavals, and internal intrigues. She did not use her poetry to criticize religious rituals like Kabir, nor did she present a highly idealized portrait of her deity like Tulsi Das. She regarded herself first and foremost a devotee completely absorbed in Krishna. That is why she sang of him, not of human beings. All the references to people are in the obsessive context of her bhakti, e.g. in the poems where she mentions Rana's attempts to kill her, she is actually showing how merciful and compassionate Krishna had been to her.

Mira Bai's padas fall into two categories:

(1) The songs of entreaty and salutation.

(2) The songs of love and related experiences.

The songs in the first group are very few in number. While composing these, Mira Bai was keeping up the tradition of bhakta poets in showing herself as a helpless, unprotected and sinful being, entreating Krishna to overlook her faults and to help her. The bhakta poets regarded themselves as the lowliest of lowly creatures, so that in helping them, God's great kindness became manifest. In her poems, Mira Bai maintains befitting humility: she is the servant of her Girdhar Nagar (her favourite epithet for Krishna), and she is content with lying at his lotus feet. Occasionally she comes very close to the poems of Tulsi Das and Sur Das in her *dasya bhava*, e.g.

Drink the delights of the name of Rama

O heart,
Shun the evil, sit with good men, listening
to the tales of Hari every day.
Put lust, anger, arrogance, greed and
selfishness out of thoughts.
Mira's Lord is Girdhar Nagar
She is drenched in his colour.

Tr. S. M. Pandey and Zide

Actually these padas of entreaty denote the second stage of her development as a true bhakta or devotee. The poems written in the beginning occasionally hint at her dissatisfaction with the ways of the world and with destiny.

Strange are the ways of destiny,
The fools reign on the throne,
The wise men are destitutes.
The sweet water of the rivers
is polluted by the salty sea.

This sentiment, in the context of her personal life, is natural, since she was widowed early, was persecuted by her husband's family, and had eventually to live in exile. But she became reconciled to her situation and found comfort in the worship of Krishna. After that only her devotion remained steadfast, unshakable, and she believed that even the cycle of births and deaths could not destroy it. Obviously her inital rebellion turned into detachment from the world, and her early devotion into love.

From the poetic fervour of her love songs, it becomes evident that Mira Bai, in her songs of entreaty, was merely following the prevalent *dasya* tradition. These songs are marked by a lack of originality. She used stock phrases in praising the deity, listing stock situations.

Mira Bai is at her lyrical best when singing of her love for Krishna. These poems form the core of Mira Bai's writings. Her love is sung in its multiple facets: attraction, hope, longing, disappointment, jealousy, anger, and the joy of union. These poems are not in any sequence of time, but only capture the mood of the moment. Experienced on the spiritual level rather than on the physical, this love represents the constant craving of the soul to be merged with *paramatman*, the infinite God, thus achieving eternal peace.

In some of the songs, Mira Bai expresses her belief that her love has continued through time and the cycles of many births.

Rana, I go to Girdhari
Girdhari is my only love
I am captivated by his beauty.
Our love is old, I cannot live without him.
Our love is from the previous life,
it can't be abandoned now.
It does not matter if the marriage has taken place in a dream,
Mother, Dinanath wed me in my dream.

On occasions when Mira Bai identifies herself with the gopis, she goes through all the emotions of a girl falling in love. She, as a gopi, has come out to sell milk and curds in the lanes of Brindaban. There she meets Krishna and is completely bewitched:

She forgot the name of curd
called out "Someone, come buy my piquant Shyam"
In the sylvan lanes of Brindaban
She was captivated by the charmer of hearts.

Krishna is dark-complexioned, comely and attractive. A peacock feather crown adorns his forehead, his earrings sparkle, and dark curls rest on his cheeks. She cannot help but say:

Krishna, I follow you everywhere
In the wooded lanes of Brindaban
you grabbed my arm.
Having drunk the buttermilk
you broke the pitcher.
Dark complexioned and attractively formed,

13

Look at me, Hari, just a little,
I look at you, but your eyes
are not on me,
How cruel is your heart.
My hope lies in your glance,
no other place is for me.
Hopefully standing, I implore and plead
till it is morning.
Mira's Lord Hari is imperishable
she will dedicate her life to him.

14

Mira sang ecstatically of Hari's virtues.
The king sent her a serpent-basket
and placed it in Mira's hands
When, bathed and washed, she took a look,
she found an image of God.
A cup of poison was sent by the king
it turned into nectar.
When bathed and washed, she took a drink
she achieved immortality.
A bed of spikes by the king was sent
ordering Mira to sleep on it.
When evening came and Mira went to sleep
she lay as if on flowers.
Mira's Lord is her eternal saviour
removing all obstacles.
Drunk with the mood of pious songs
she vows herself to Girdhar.

15

My eyes are thirsty
for the sight of you.
Look, friend, the day has passed
watching the road
a heap of sorrow has fallen on my eyes.
The koel bird sits on a branch, singing,
hearing its song is painful
The world says harsh things,
and laughs at me.
But Mira is sold to Hari,
she is his slave for many, many lives.

16

See my friend!
Hari has hardened his heart towards me.
He said he would come
but even today he didn't
though he promised.
I have forgotten food, drink and reason
how am I still living ?
I took his word against the world's,
why has he forgotten me ?
O Lord of Mira, Girdhar Nagar,
without you my heart is torn.

17

Go back to the same banks of Jumna, O heart.
Jumna's water is clear, it cools the body.
Accompanied by Balbir[1], Krishna plays on his flute.

[1] Krishna's foster brother.

The yellow scarf and the peacock feather crown,
the diamond earrings sparkle.
Mira's Lord is Girdhar Nagar,
who plays with brother Balbir.

18

My beloved has come to my house.
I have watched the road for ages and ages
I, the bereft one, have attained him.
Having decked the dish for worship
I give away precious gems for him.
After many supplications
my love sent me this message.
My dark lover has come,
happiness adorns my limbs.
Hari is an ocean of love,
my eyes are tied to him with love,
Mira is an ocean of happiness,
she will make him welcome.

19

On the banks of Jumna
he plays on his flute.
The flute has stolen my heart,
there is no peace in my mind.
Krishna is dark, with dark kamri[1],
dark is the water of Jumna.
At the sound of flute
my senses leave me
my body trembles.
Mira says: Lord Girdhar,
quickly take away my pain.

[1] A cover or a blanket.

20

The proud son of Nand[1] dwells in my heart.
He stood holding the kadam-tree[2] branch,
gently smiled and looked at me laughingly.
He wore a yellow scarf and a kachhni;[3]
a jewelled crown encircled his forehead.
Mira's Lord is Girdhar Nagar;
when she saw his face her heart was captivated.

21

When the dark-hued son of Nand came before my eyes
I threw away fear of the world, abandoned my senses.
The peacock-feathers adorned his crown,
On the forehead, the saffron mark pleased the eyes.
The earrings sparkled, the curls rippled on his cheek
like fish leaving the pond and going to meet a crocodile.
My Lord, appearing as an actor, has charmed the world.
Mira says: she dedicates herself
to the whole being of Lord Girdhar.

22

Dwell in my eyes, O son of Nand.
The peacock feather crown
the fish-shaped earrings
the red mark is adorning your forehead.
Yours is the bewitching form,
the dark face,
large eyes.

---

[1] The foster-father of Krishna.

[2] The tree *neulea cadamba.*

[3] A one-piece cloth worn by men, down from the waist.

The flute resting on nectar-filled lips
the garland of victory is decorating your chest.
Mira says: Lord, you give joy to holy men
and affection to your devotees.

23

Don't go away, O yogi,[1]
I fall at your feet, I am your slave.
The path of love-devotion is unfamiliar,
show me the way to it.
Let me build a pyre of sandalwood
set fire to it yourself.
When I am burnt to a heap of ashes
smear it on your body.
Mira says: O Lord Girdhar Nagar
put the two flames together.

24

If you love a yogi
Sorrow is your portion.
I tell you friend, there is no joy in loving;
a yogi is no one's friend.
Without seeing him
there is no rest for me day or night.
But in this world
I didn't see another face
like him.
Mira says: when will you meet me, my Lord,
your meeting will give me joy.

[1] An ascetic, Mira views Krishna as a man who has left his home and gone away.

25

To love a wanderer is the root of sorrow.
He pretends to be friendly, and charms people,
only to forget them later.
He plucks out the love like jasmine flowers.
Mira says: My Lord, without seeing you
my heart is pierced by pain.

26

Love, stay before my eyes,
stay before my eyes, and forget me not.
I am about to drown in the sea of existence,
come, quickly save me, O Shyam.
The poison cup that Rana sent me
You turned into nectar.
Mira says: Lord Girdhar Nagar,
Once united never part from me.

27

Why is Girdhar angry at me ?
If I have any defect, point it out, let me hear it.
I am your slave, in all my lives
My Lord, you possess all the virtues.
Mira says: Lord Girdhar Nagar,
your name alone I recite.

28[1]

Hari, you take away the troubles of your people.
You saved the modesty of Draupadi,[2]

---

[1] This poem refers to some well-known legends of God Vishnu coming to the rescue of his worshippers in their hour of peril.

[2] Draupadi was the wife of the five Pandava brothers, whose tale is told

lengthening her sari.
For your devotee you took the form of a man-lion.[1]
You saved the drowning elephant[2]
cutting off his troubles.
Mira says: Prince Girdhar,
take away my troubles.

29

My sleep is destroyed, O friend;
The whole night was spent
watching for my love.
All friends have preached
words of wisdom,
my heart didn't accept even one.
There is no rest without seeing him,
but there is no anger in my heart.
My limbs are weak and restless
my lips call my love, my love;
The pain of separation in my heart
is understood by no one.
I am like the rainbird[3] calling for the clouds,
like the fish desiring the water.
Mira is distraught and bereft
She has been rendered senseless.

in the epic Mahabharata. Once when the Pandavas had gambled and lost everything to their cousin-rival Duryodhan, the latter, to crown their humiliation, had Draupadi dragged in front of the assembly to be publicly disrobed by his brother Duhshasan. Draupadi prayed to Krishna to save her modesty and her sari went on lengthening until Duhshasan was tired of pulling it.

[1] Prahlad was a worshipper of Vishnu, against the wishes of his own father. His incensed father tried to harm his son, Prahlad, in many ways, but each time Prahlad emerged unharmed. In the end Vishnu took the form of half-man, half-lion and killed Prahlad's father.

[2] Once an elephant's foot was caught by an alligator. The elephant prayed to Vishnu to be saved. Vishnu killed the alligator and set the elephant free, who went to heaven.

[3] According to belief, the rainbird drinks and lives only on the raindrops.

30

I saw the clouds and wept, Shyam
I saw the clouds and wept.
Black and yellow they gathered in the sky
raining all day.
Wherever I looked there was water
the thirsty earth became green.
But my love dwelled in a foreign land
I stood outside, getting drenched.
Mira's Lord is imperishable Hari.
Her love for him is steadfast.

31

To meet Shyam, O friend, a longing
has awakened in my heart.
Writhing in agony, I have no rest,
the fire of separation is alight.
Day and night I watch the road for my love,
my eyelids never close at all.
Calling 'dear one, dear one,' night and day,
I have given up the concern for people's opinion.
The snake of separation has bitten my heart
the waves of poison sweep through me.
Mira is disturbed and very distraught;
a desire for Shyam has kindled in her.

32

Love, without you sleep does not come to me.
Each moment passes for me like an eternity,
separation burns me every instant.
Without my love, the darkness does not seem to go,
the lamp in the palace pleases me not.

The bed of flowers becomes full of nails,
the night is spent waking.
Whom shall I tell? Who listens to me?
No one believes what I say.
My love like a serpent bit my hand
I am dying, swept by the poisonous waves.
The frogs, the peacocks and the rainbirds cry;
the koel also sings.
The clouds gather with great force
the flashing lightning frightens me.
Is there in the world any lover of God
who could remove the pain of my heart?
Mira's Lord Hari is imperishable.
Her eyes love to see him.

33

Dear one, come and let me look at you,
I cannot live without you.
A lotus without water,
a night without the moon;
without you my life is ebbing.
I spent the night in turmoil,
separation eating my heart.
Not hungry in the daytime,
I get no sleep at night,
no words can express my state.
O friend, who is to listen to me?
whom shall I tell?
Meeting my beloved will quench the burning.
Why do you make me suffer, Antaryamin?[1]
when you come the pain will go.
Mira has been your slave for many lives,
Her love is always for you.

---

[1] One who lives within; omniscient.

34

Shyam averts his face from me,
but he plays with other (women).
To me he does not even talk,
Shyam averts his face from me.
He never comes to my lane,
but wanders in her courtyard.
Shyam does not even touch my finger,
but playfully twists her arms.
He doesn't even touch my sari-end,
but opens up her veil.
Mira's Lord is dark,
he likes to flirt with others.

35

The month of Shravan arouses my longing,
my Shyam, please come home!
Gathering here from four directions
the clouds thunder loudly.
Frogs, peacocks and rainbirds call,
the koel also sings.
Lord of Mira, Girdhar Nagar,
whatever I dedicate to you is all so little.

36

O friend of the helpless, open your eyes,
for how long have I been standing waiting to obey.
My relatives have turned my enemies
I am disliked by everyone.
There is no one except you, my love,
my wayward boat is struck at sea.

No peace in day, no sleep at night,
I am wasting away, standing and waiting.
The arrow of separation has struck my heart
I cannot forget you, even for an instant.
You saved even Ahalya[1] who, turned to stone,
was lying in the forest.
What burden has Mira got?
She is light compared to Ahalya.

37

My wandering love, come home.
The body's fire will be quenched,
I will become happy.
We will sing auspicious songs together.
Hearing the sound of clouds, the peacock is overjoyed
come to my courtyard.
Seeing the moon, the lilies bloom
let delight overwhelm me.
Every pore of my body will be cool, O friend,
when Mohan comes to my courtyard.
He helps all his worshippers
he is going to keep the promise.
Mira is separated from her Girdhar Nagar,
come to me and remove my torment.

38

O, I am mad with pain,
and no one understands it.

---

1. Ahalya's story is narrated in Ramayana. She was a beautiful woman who was turned to stone as a result of the curse put on her by her sage husband who found her unfaithful. She was brought back to life by the touch of Rama's feet.

Only the wounded knows
the pain of another sufferer,
cherishing the fire in the heart.
Only the jeweller knows the value
of a diamond,
not the one who lost it.
Racked by pain I wander everywhere
finding no physician.
O Lord, Mira's pain will only go
when the Dark One is the healer.

39

O friend, my love is fixed on Krishna's feet.
Without his vision, nothing pleases me
the world seems an illusion, a dream.
The sea of attachment causes fear
the worldly relations become fetters
I have thrown myself at Hari's feet.
Mira says, her Lord is Girdhar
I have taken refuge with him in hope.

40

Shyam, you have accepted my hand.
Drowning in the sea of existence
I took refuge with you.
There is no limit to my sins
only you can bear them.
Mira says, my imperishable Lord
you have to keep your reputation (of a saviour).

41

Shyam has become rare like the new moon.
Having gone to Madhuban
he acts like the people there
after capturing us in the net of love.
Mira's Lord is Girdhar Nagar
his love seems to have waned.

42

The clouds of Shravan rain, my friend
of Shravan, pleasing to the heart.
In Shravan my heart is filled with joy
for I have heard the rumour of Shyam's coming.
The clouds have come, gathering from everywhere
bringing lightning and showers of raindrops.
The clouds rain in tiny drops,
the pleasing, cool breeze blows.
Girdhar Nagar is Mira's Lord;
this is time to sing auspicious songs.

43

Full of colour, full of love,
I play Holi[1] with Shyam.
The red gulal[2] spreading
has coloured the clouds red.
From the long syringes
the multicoloured drops spray.
My pitcher is full of saffron,

---

1. The well-known Hindu Festival of colour celebrated in March or April.
2. The red powder thrown about during the Holi festival.

sandalwood, chova[1] and argaja[2].
Mira belongs to Girdhar Nagar.
She stays the servant of his feet.

44

Dark-coloured Ram my beloved
has arrived in my city.
My life might go, but I shall not abandon love
I shall stay, clinging to his feet.
Having gone around the seven continents
Hari dwells merged in Hari.
He has won the three worlds,[3]
going round them in three steps.
Mira's Lord Hari is imperishable:
she will stay clinging to his feet.

45

Wake up, dear boy that holds the flute!
Wake up, my dear, wake up my child.
The night has passed, the dawn has come,
each house has opened up its doors.
There's heard, as milkmaids churn the curd,
their bracelets' jingle-jangle sound.
Get up, dear child, the dawn has come,
outside the door wait gods and men.
The cowherd lads all raise a noise,
they shout the words, "Jai! Jai!"[4]

---

[1] An unguent or fragrant paste of four ingredients, namely, sandal, aquallochum, saffron and musk.

[2] A perfume of several scented ingredients.

[3] Refers to the legend of Vishnu in one of his incarnations measuring the three worlds (heaven, earth and the nether world) in three steps.

[4] 'Jai' implies 'victory' as well as 'Hail to Thee'.

They're holding butter and bread in hand,
the men who give the cattle care.
The comely Girdhar, Mira's Lord,
saves those who for salvation come.

46

O my friend, my shyness
became my enemy.
Why did I not go away with my prince Sri Gopal[1]?
I stood wringing my hands
when cruel Akrur[2]
took him away in a chariot.
Separated from Shyam,
my body is now consumed by fire.
Mira, the slave of Prince Girdhar, wonders
What is sustaining me?

47

What recourse do I have except Hari?
You are my protector and I am your servant.
All the time your name spins around in my heart.
I call out again and again: my Lord, I desire you.
I am surrounded by this sansara[3], this ocean of imperfections,
My boat is punctured; Lord, put up the sail!
The birhin[4] awaits her beloved,
always keep her near you.

---

1. The protector of the cows, an epithet of Krishna.
2. An uncle of Krishna who came to Brindaban to take him to Mathura, so that Krishna could accomplish the death of the tyrant Kansa.
3. The world.
4. A woman separated from her husband or lover.

48

I am unable to write
a letter to him.
While holding the pen
my hand trembles
from the eyes flows a stream.
I try but cannot say what is in my heart
I am afraid.
You see my predicament,
go and tell this to Hari.
Mira's Lord is Girdhar Nagar;
keep me close to your lotus feet.

49

How can one meet the Lord?
One spends five watches[1] in business,
three in sleep.
One receives a priceless human birth
and wastes it sleeping.
Worship Mira's Lord Girdhar!
Whatever happens, let it happen.

---

[1] Duration of three hours, thus twenty-four hours have eight watches.

50[1]

My love, come and let me see you.
I have repeated this often,
now be kind to me.
In the month of Jeth,
the birds are sad without the water.
In Asarh the peacocks and the rainbirds
call for the clouds.
The showers continue in Savan
my friends celebrate the festival of Tij.[2]
The rivers overflow in Bhadon,
the distance (from you) pains me.
When it is Ashwin,
the mother-of-pearl drinks the drops of Swati.[3]
In Kartik people worship their gods
but you are my only God.
Agahan is cold
coming quickly take care of me.
In Paush the frost covers the earth
you are not here.
The spring comes in Magh
songs are sung by everyone.
People play Holi in Phagun,
Banraj trees seem to burn me.
The desire grows stronger in Chait
you should let me see you.
In Baishakh, the Banraj trees bloom
the koel bird sings.
Consulting priests and astrologers,

---

[1] This poem shows the tradition of medieval Hindi poetry where the pain of separation in different seasons is depicted.

[2] *Tij* is a festival celebrated by women during Shravan, the fifth month of Hindu calendar.

[3] *Swati* is said to be the star Arcturus.

Mira, the separated one, is desolate.
When will she see you?
My days are spent sending up the crows.[1]

---

[1] There is a belief that if a crow comes and sits on any part of the house, it is an auspicious omen denoting that a loved person is coming for a visit.

The twelve months of Indian Calendar are:

Jeth	(Jyeshtha)	corresponding to	May-June.
Asarh	(Ashadha)	-do-	June-July.
Savan	(Shravan)	-do-	July-August.
Bhadon	(Bhadrapad)	-do-	August-September.
Ashwin	(Ashwin)	-do-	September-October.
Kartik	(Kartik)	-do-	October-November.
Agahan	(Agrahayan)	-do-	November-December.
Paush	(Paush)	-do-	December-January.
Magh	(Magh)	-do-	January-February.
Phagun	(Phalgun)	-do-	February-March.
Chait	(Chaitra)	-do-	March-April.
Baishakh	(Vaishakh)	-do-	April-May.

Select Bibliography

ENGLISH

Allchin, F.R. (trans.). *Kavitavali*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1964.

————. *The Petition to Ram*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1966.

Archer, W.G. *The Loves of Krishna*. New York: Grove Press, 1964.

Bhattacharya, Deben (trans.). *Love Songs of Vidyapati*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961.

Bihari, Bankey. *Bhakta Mira*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1961.

Dimock, Edward, C., Jr. (trans.). *In Praise of Krishna*. New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1966.

Farquhar, John Nicol. *Modern Religious Movements in India*. New York: Macmillan, 1915.

——. *An Outline of Religious Literatures of India*. London: Oxford University Press, 1920.

Goetz, Herman. *Mira Bai, Her Life and Times*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1966.

Handoo, G.K. *Tulasidasa*. Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1964.

Krishna: Myths, Rites and Attitudes, ed. Milton B. Singer. Honolulu: East West Center Press, 1966.

Pandey, S.M. and Norman, H. Zide (trans.). *The Poems of Mira Bai*. Mimeographed, University of Chicago, 1964.

Sen, Sukumar. *History of Bengali Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1960.

Tod, James. *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, ed. W. Crooke. London: Oxford University Press, 1920.

Vaswani T. W, *Saint Mira*. Poona: n.d.

HINDI

Bhati, Desraj Singh. *Mira Bai, aur Unki Padavali*. New Delhi: Ashok Prakashan, 1962.

Chaturvedi, Barsane Lal, *Mira Padavali*. Mathura: Sahitya Sangam, 1965.

Chaturvedi, Parashuram. *Mira Bai ki Padavali*. Prayag: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1949.

Das, Vraj Ratna. *Mira Madhuri*. Varanasi: Hindi Sahitya Kutir, 1956.

Lal, Shri Krishna. *Mira Bai*. Allahabad: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1949,

Mira Smriti Granth, ed. S. Sharma. Calcutta: Bangiya Hindi Parishad, 1949.

Misra, Bhuvaneshwara Nath. *Mira ki Prem Sadhna*. Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1966.

Prabhat. *Mira Bai*. Bombay: Hindi Granth Ratnakar, 1965.

Shabnam, Padmavati. *Mira Brihad Pada Sangraha*. Benares: Lok Sevak Prakashan, 1952.

Sinha, Savitri. *Madhyakalin Hindi Kaviyitriyan*. Delhi: Atma Ram and Sons, 1953.

Srivastava, Murlidhar. *Mira Darshan*. Allahabad: Sahitya Bhavan, 1956.

CC-0. Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation, Chandigarh

Makers of Indian Literature

Each monograph in the series tells the story of the life and work of an outstanding Indian writer who has made contribution of abiding value to the literature in any Indian language. Some of the monographs already published are:

Jayadeva
classical Sanskrit poet
by Suniti Kumar Chatterji
Banabhatta
classical Sanskrit author
by K. Krishnamoorthy
Kamban
Tamil epic poet
by S. Maharajan
Ilango Adigal
classical Tamil poet
by M. Varadarajan
Nammalvar
Tamil mystic poet
by A. Srinivasa Raghavan
Chandidas
mediaeval Bengali poet
by Sukumar Sen
Basavesvara
mediaeval Kannada poet and savant
by H. Thipperudraswamy
Vemana
mediaeval Telugu saint-poet
by V. R. Narla
Vidyapati
mediaeval Maithili poet
by Ramanath Jha
Jnanadeva
Marathi mystic and saint-poet
by P. Y. Deshpande
Kabir
mediaeval Hindi saint-poet
by Prabhakar Machwe
Sarala Dasa
Oriya epic poet
by Krishna Chandra Panigrahi